

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /088 W
-----102403 150617Z /10

R 141126Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7181
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 4773

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, PK
SUBJECT: MLA SENTENCES PRESSMEN TO LASHES

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 4549 (B) ISLAMABAD 4641

1. ELEVEN MORE JOURNALISTS WERE SENTENCED BY A SUMMARY MILITARY COURT 13 MAY FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE LAHORE JOURNALISTS' HUNGER STRIKE (REFTELS). THE MAJORITY OF THOSE SENTENCED RECEIVED FINES AND VARYING LENGTHS OF HARD LABOR; FOUR WERE SENTENCED TO BETWEEN THREE AND FIVE LASHES. PRESS REPORTS SAY THAT THE LASHINGS WERE CARRIED OUT EVENING OF 13 MAY. FIVE PERSONS WERE
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RELEASED WITH WARNINGS.

2. IN THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF REACTION FROM THE POLITICIANS, MAHMOOD ALI KASURI, UP OF THE TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL, CALLED 13 MAY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE THOSE ARRESTED, AND ALLOW THE LAHORE EDITION OF MUSAWAAT TO REOPEN. HANEEF RAMAY, AN EX-MEMBER OF MANY OF PAKISTAN'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND A FORMER EDITOR OF

MUSAWAAT, HAS CABLED AN APPEAL TO CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR (CMLA) GENERAL ZIA TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION OF THE PRESS WORKERS' DISPUTE. PRIVATELY, HE TOLD POLCOUNS IN LAHORE ON 12 MAY THE STRIKE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO GO ON FOR A LONG, LONG TIME AND THAT THE MLA IS BEING FOOLISH IF IT THINKS STIFFER SENTENCES WILL BREAK THE BACK OF THE STRIKE. NEGOTIATIONS, HE SAID, ARE THE ONLY WAY OUT.

3. JOURNALISTS IN LAHORE AND ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY ARE INCREASINGLY BITTER OVER PRESS CENSORSHIP, WHICH HAS GROWN BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS IN THE LAST FOUR TO FIVE MONTHS FROM AN ALMOST FREE ATMOSPHERE TO THE CURRENT PRACTICE OF REPEATED "GUIDANCE" FROM THE GOVERNMENT ON WHAT TO PRINT (OR NOT PRINT) AND WHAT PROMINENCE (OR NOT) TO ACCORD VARIOUS STORIES. THE RESULT IS THAT THE LAHORE STRIKE IS GETTING GROWING SUPPORT FROM OTHER AREAS. THOSE ARRESTED ARE REPORTEDLY NO LONGER JUST HIGH VISIBILITY JOURNALIYRS AND EDITORS, BUT PRESS OPERATORS AND OTHER LOWER RANKING EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING CLERKS.

4. LAHORE JOURNALISTS TOLD POLCOUNS, IN FACT, THAT MANY OF THOSE VOLUNTEERING TO COURT ARREST ARE NOT FROM LAHORE BUT RATHER FROM OTHER AREAS, EVEN OUTSIDE THE PUNJAB. THEIR TRANSPORTATION TO LAHORE, WE UNDERSTAND, HAS BEEN FULLY FUNDED, AND THE FAMILIES OF THOSE ARRESTED HAVE RECEIVED ASSURANCES IN ADVANCE THAT THEY WILL BE SUPPORTED WHILE THE BREADWINNER IS IN JAIL.

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5. THE INITIAL SOURCE OF MONEY FOR THIS ACTIVITY IS PRESUMABLY MUSAWAAT, AND THUS BEGUM BHUTTO, BUT THERE ARE ALSO SUGGESTIONS THAT THE SOVIETS MAY BE PROVIDING FINAN IWV SUPPORT FOR MUSAWAAT AS PART OF A VISIBLE STEP-UP IN THEIR PRESS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.

6. COMMENT: THE STEP-UP TO LASHINGS IN LAHORE IS AN OMINOUS SIGN FOR BOTH THE MLA AND THE JOURNALISTS. MANY HERE SENSE THAT THE MLA IS DIGGING A HOLE IT CAN'T GET OUT OF AND THAT THE CONFRONTATION WITH THE PRESS IS NOW TAKING ON THE HALLMARKS OF A BROADER, POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN WHICH THE MLA MAY BE OVER-PLAYING ITS HAND AND UNDERESTIMATING THE PUBLIC MOOD.
HUMMEL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL REPRESSION, CENSORSHIP, COURT DECISIONS, JOURNALISTS, THE PRESS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ISLAMA04773
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780204-1083
Format: TEL
From: ISLAMABAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780560/aaaabzei.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0ea31c9f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ISLAMABAD 4549, 78 ISLAMABAD 4641
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2697645
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MLA SENTENCES PRESSMEN TO LASHES
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, SOPN, PK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0ea31c9f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014